Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Tennessee Department of Health

September 2013

Volume 1, Issue 2

Making the Journey to Better Health

Finding Faith in Food

While Jennifer Bailey was studying policy at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, she never thought she would move to Nashville or pursue a master's degree from Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Her plans were to continue to pursue a career in policy in Washington, D.C. or another large city. Upon learning she was the recipient of the National Emerson Hunger Fellowship, her plans changed.

Bailey's site placement for the fellowship was Nashville, working on food and hunger issues with a local faith-based organization. Through that service, she recognized the importance of work by faith communities to improve access to quality food for all people.

This led Bailey to begin her studies at Vanderbilt and to become a staff member of Community Food Advocates, a Nashville-based, non-profit whose mission is: "to end hunger and create a healthy, just and sustainable food system." Bailey now serves as the Food Stamp Outreach Specialist, working with individuals and organizations, including faith communities, to help them understand and access

Cont. page 3

Bailey presents about SNAP benefits at the East Nashville Farmer's Market

Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- Learn how to make your food pantry healthier.
- Learn about mindful eating and its benefits.
- Thinking about starting a community or congregational garden? We've got tips for you!

Food Pantry Makeover

Toni Jacobsen, LCSW, of Jewish Family Service (JFS) didn't anticipate starting a food program when she began serving families through case management and counseling services. But when she started seeing that clients were having to make monthly decisions between purchasing needed medications and food, the idea for the Kosher Food box was born. Procuring seed funding from the National Council of Jewish Women, JFS was able to launch a Kosher Food Box Program in 2009, providing food to 20-30 low-income families and individuals per month. Currently, the Kosher food box is supported by NCJW, The Jewish Federation, and generous donors.

As many know, starting a feeding program is no easy

Cont. page 3

Gleaning for a Good Cause

by Lynette Johnson, Society of St. Andrew

Fruits and vegetables, so important for good health, are often in short supply for low-income Tennesseans. The Society of St. Andrew (ENDhunger.org), a faith-based nonprofit focused on reducing food waste to feed the hungry, offers a solution to issues of fresh produce access and affordability.

The organization mobilizes volunteers to 'glean' fresh fruits and vegetables, picking, digging or gathering the good food left behind after commercial harvest. The food is distributed rapidly to local food banks, food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, emergency and disaster relief programs, senior and child nutrition programs, Title I schools and other locations.

There is never a charge and food is always provided in quantities that can be used quickly and without waste. Since Society of St. Andrew began work in Tennessee in July 2010, its members have distributed 10.5 million servings of fresh, nourishing fruits and vegetables to 405 feeding agencies, reaching persons at risk for hunger in every county in the state.

Volunteers glean produce from farms such as this one in Bells Bend, TN

In September 2010, Society of St. Andrew staffers visited Knox Area Rescue Mission, KARM, and toured the facility's walk-in cooler. Inside, there was a small bag of carrots, a half-eaten deli salad and a few white potatoes. This was all the fresh produce they had available to serve 1,200 guests that day. Today, KARM has a steady supply of fresh fruits and vegetables delivered by Society of St. Andrew volunteers from gleanings at the Knoxville Downtown Farmers Market and the UT Farmers Market.

KARM benefitted this summer from a "Grow More, Give More" campaign, a partnership between UT Ag Extension Services and Society of St. Andrew that encourages farmers and backyard gardeners to donate their surplus produce to feed the hungry. So far in 2013, Society of St. Andrew has provided 14,970 servings of healthy food to KARM, enough to provide a day's worth of fresh fruits and vegetables to about 3,000 individuals.

If you are interested in volunteering with Society of St. Andrew, visit its website, ENDhunger.org or contact Program Coordinator, Linda Tozer, at 615-878-9233.

Editor's Note: The Society of St. Andrew operates statewide and often utilizes volunteers from faith communities. Please visit their website for information regarding how your faith community can be involved in gleaning.

Finding Faith in Food cont.

federal food benefit programs. Faith communities are an important partner in this effort since many are in areas most affected by limited access to quality food -- often described as a "food deserts."

Bailey's exploration of the relationship of food and faith has motivated her to host activities at local churches centered on food justice. Recently she screened the film "Soul Food Junkies" at Howard Congregation United Church of Christ, a historically African-American congregation in Nashville. The film prompted a discussion about the cultural significance of "soul food" in African-American congregations as well as the potential health impacts of this tradition. She also worked to create an adult education curriculum to look at the theology of food justice and racial reconciliation through food.

"Food plays an instrumental role in every faith tradition," Bailey said. "It's something faith communities hold very close to their hearts. Faith communities have an incredible and unique opportunity to speak to the hearts and minds of people and thus have great potential to transform the food system in their communities."

She emphasized addressing food issues doesn't mean letting go of one's faith or traditions. Instead, it can simply be starting the important conversation of how foods can be selected and prepared to be better for us.

Food Pantry Makeover cont.

task. Based on the Jewish dietary laws, JFS developed a food box that was Kosher and provided a variety of foods clients would eat. They tried to provide a variety of food that was healthy, of good quality and that the majority of their clients would eat. Pam Kelner, Executive Director of JFS, stresses they are very intentional about what goes in the box. "We aren't going to put food in that the majority of our clients won't eat, that would be wasteful."

A few years ago, JFS enlisted the help of a dietetic intern at Second Harvest Food Bank to evaluate the Kosher Food Box. The intern noted that though the food box already contained a variety of healthy options, a few changes could be made. She suggested substituting whole grain bread and brown rice for white bread and white rice and substituting frozen vegetables for canned vegetables, which are often high in sodium. They also added boxed milk and canned salmon as well as dried-nuts and fruits. A partnership with a local farmer allowed food box recipients to spend a voucher worth $7 on fresh local produce, chosen by clients.

When asked about tips on helping other faith communities increase the quality of foods provided in food boxes or feeding programs, Kelner and Jacobsen stated that a makeover doesn't have to be expensive, especially if faith communities form partnerships with individuals and organizations such as local farmers, food banks, grocery stores and dieticians. They also mentioned the importance of preserving the dignity of clients by serving foods familiar to them, food that promotes and maintains health and not just food that will satiate hunger, as well as providing options when possible.

Overall, they mentioned the importance of being mindful of the purpose of the program and if it met the goals and values of the faith community. Jacobsen stated, "My heart wouldn't be 100 percent in it if we didn't provide them with healthy food."

"My heart wouldn't be 100 percent in it if we didn't provide them with healthy food." T. Jacobsen

Finding Food in Faith Communities

Realizing the quality of their food wasn't as good as the quality of the rest of their preschool program, West End United Methodist Church in Nashville hired Martha Stamps to revamp their feeding program. It was, perhaps, a match made in heaven.

Giving up the restaurant she owned, Stamps revised the preschool program from mass-produced commercial food to healthy servings of fruits and vegetables grown by local farmers which are processed and cooked in the kitchen of the church facility. Currently Stamps and her team serve 150 people, staff and children of the preschool program.

As part of the environmentally friendly effort, Stamps also created a garden in the church parking lot. She says while many may think of food and faith community meals strictly in terms of calories and "good food" and "bad food," she sees food as something more.

"We've given up our right to choose what we eat and our connection with nature," She says. "Cooking from scratch and using locally-produced ingredients allows us to reconnect with those who grew the food and the ground from which it came, as opposed to using already-prepared food with extra additives that come from an unknown source. That connection is important in living out core values of almost every faith tradition of treating others and the land with gratitude and respect. Every faith tradition contains some element of food, and feeding ourselves is symbolic of our relationship with God."

While it may cost more in time and money to prepare food this way, Stamps sees our meal times as an investment in ourselves and as a way to honor our bodies and others as we eat together in a community. By providing health, pleasure and happiness, Stamps sees eating food sourced, prepared and eaten in a community as a means of living out her faith.

Stamps also began hosting a workshop series at West End UMC called "A Place at the Table." It replaces the traditional Wednesday night potluck with locally produced foods on non-disposable flatware and features informative presentations. The series has included a film about food and a speaker to talk about the relationship between faith and food, health or the earth. The series was intended to run for a few weeks, but Stamps says "they've never asked me to stop."

She notes one small thing faith communities can do to save money and be a good steward of the Earth is to switch from disposable cups, plates, and silverware to non-disposable equivalents. She say that is a way of "honoring ourselves and to remind us we are not disposable, nor is the act of eating a worthless event."

For a small fee to cover the cost of the food, anyone in the community can come and participate in the series.

The gardens at West End United Methodist Church grow a variety of vegetables, herbs and flowers.

Finding Food in Faith Communities cont.

Another faith community in Tennessee is also practicing their faith through a connection to food. At Milligan College, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, college, church and community members teamed up to create a place for food and faith to grow hand-in-hand. The community garden, a partnership between Hopwood Christian Church, Milligan College, Emmanuel seminary and the community, is now in its fourth season of providing food to the community, church members, seminary students and families.

The garden project was started on the campus when Jeremiah Key, at that time an employee of Milligan College and member of Hopwood Christian Church, wanted to act on his interest in growing food. Key recruited 15 volunteers to help plant, tend and harvest the garden. Participants celebrated their work by hosting potluck dinners at each other's homes (using produce from the garden), making pesto together and having volunteer work days. Since that first year, the garden has continued to be a collaborative project and is currently located behind Emmanuel Seminary, just across the street from its original location, on land donated by a church member.

Key says one of the benefits of gardening in the community is, "creating a space to slow down and have more meaningful conversation." Gardening has also allowed Key, church members and college students to have a place to experience "the reality of the spiritual, physical, and practical" aspects of life.

"Gardening allows one to become aware of where one's food comes from and to appreciate the work others have done and the resources and knowledge needed to garden," he says. "When you pick green beans, you know how long it takes. Gardening also provides an outlet for gratitude, a key aspect of many faith traditions. It's gratifying to go from seed to harvest to table."

Key encourages other faith communities to garden, stating many lessons faith communities can learn by growing together including:

- **Learning about oneself and one's community**
- **Learning dependence on the weather, the land and each other**
- **Learning that even in trials like droughts or floods, a well-tended garden can still produce bags and bags of produce**

"You can still find abundance even in the worst years. There's always something to give thanks for."

-J. Key

Finally, Key encourages congregations to not be intimidated and to start small. A community garden can start as one small raised bed. When asked what one of the most important lessons learned about gardening since he started four years ago, Key replied, "That you can still find abundance even in the worst years. There's always something to give thanks for."

Mindful Eating: More than Watching Calories

When listening to discussions about food and health, one often hears about calories, fat, portion control, obesity, diet, nutrition, good food and bad food. But when it comes to healthy eating, are there other words and phrases we could consider?

Does eating healthy mean always counting calories or being on a diet, or could there be another approach? To answer that question, we interviewed Melissa Brown, a nutrition coach at Vanderbilt Center for Integrative Health.

During the last four years in her work with VCIH, she has worked with clients to help them make changes to eat in a way that works for their bodies and lifestyles. One of the practices Brown employs is mindful eating. The Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives spoke with Melissa about the practice of mindful eating.

OFBCI: So tell us, what is mindful eating?

Melissa: Mindful eating isn't about watching what you eat; rather, it's about eating with more awareness. Let's define what it means to be mindful first. It's becoming more aware in the present moment of everything in your surroundings and inside yourself. Mindful eating then is becoming aware of how we eat, why we eat, what eat and what we're eating for"

OFBCI: So what's the importance of mindful eating? Why is it important that people eat mindfully?

Melissa: Eating more mindfully allows people to ENJOY nurturing and fueling their body. Many people have a negative relationship to food that can look like chronic dieting or calorie counting and negative thoughts about willpower and self-image. Many people may not even enjoy food anymore. Becoming aware of our eating can lead to a change in eating habits. It can move us out of an intellectual experience with eating --'I can have more dinner because I had salad for lunch or I ate a brownie today so I have already ruined the day" -- and into a more body centered, sensory experience- "I am craving oranges today; I am feeling satisfied so I'll stop eating now.' Eating mindfully restores a healthy relationship with food.

OFBCI: So how does one eat mindfully?

"Eating mindfully restores a healthy relationship with food. "

M. Brown

Melissa: To understand how to eat mindfully, let's look at how to eat mindlessly.

Here are some examples:

Eating at your desk at work while answering emails.
Eating while driving your car.
Eating while sitting in front of the television.

Mindless eating is eating without being present and without awareness. It's an automatic response like driving home from work and not remembering the journey from work to home. Some might look down at their plate and wonder who ate the rest of their sandwich.

Mindful Eating cont.

OFBCI: Good point. So then how does one eat with awareness?

Melissa: First take a moment to notice the process of how we eat:

Am I tasting my food? How many times per bite am I chewing?
Do I enjoy my food? How does it taste? How does it smell? Do I like the texture?
Am I hungry when I eat? Do I notice when I'm full?

Don't forget to notice where you are when you eat. Are you in your car, at your desk, sitting down, standing up or running out the door?

Then think about why you eat:

Is it because you're hungry? Is it because you're lonely?
Is it because it's time to eat?
Is it to avoid a particular emotion?

Then notice what you eat:

What is the physical outcome of eating this food? Do I feel jittery or tired? Does this food serve to nourish and fuel me? Is it grown and produced in such a way that aligns with my faith and beliefs?
If not, then am I ok with the consequences?

Finally, notice what your food choice is doing for you. What is it that you want to get out of eating in a larger sense? Since we eat three times a day at least, this one act can make a large impact in what we stand for in our own health, our families, our communities and the earth.

Do I eat to support local farmers and/or the economy of my community?
Do I eat as a practice of my faith and beliefs?
Do I eat because I want to lose weight?
Do I eat to support the restaurants and grocery stores in my community?
Do I eat to put food into my body that has nutrients to nourish my body and doesn't have chemicals or additives that might harm it?
Do I eat to help my body heal from an illness or injury?

OFBCI: Wow. It sounds like there's a lot more to eating than just calories and diet. Is there anything else you'd like for us to know?

Melissa: I want to address two common myths about mindful eating. Sometimes people think mindful eating is about counting calories and watching what you eat. Others think that you have to be mindful every time you eat. Mindful eating is a simple process that helps us move out of our heads and into our bodies, but like any process, it's something we may not do all the time. It is a *practice* that we can adopt.

OFBCI: Though mindful eating sounds like a great practice, it's good to know that I don't need to feel ashamed if I don't eat mindfully ALL of the time. So if I were to ask you to give any final words as to why mindful eating is a good practice, what would you say?

Melissa: To put the fun back into eating and learn to truly nourish our bodies!

Tennessee Department of Health
Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination Faith-Based Initiative

Director: Michele Gourley, MD, MPH
Cordell Hull Building, 3rd Floor
425 5th Ave. N
Nashville, TN 37243

Phone: 615-253-2211
Fax: 615-253-8830
E-mail: michele.gourley@tn.gov

We're on the Web!

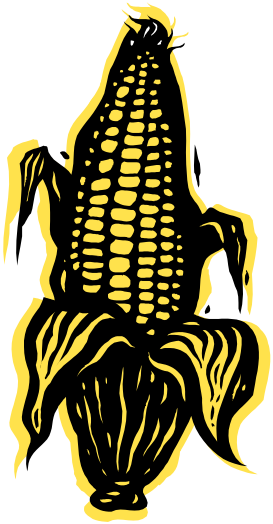
http://health.state.tn.us/dmhde/faith.shtml

"Protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of Tennesseans. "

In our journey to better health, we often think about the destination, avoiding detours and possible dead-ends like death and disease, how many pounds we'd like to lose and how many years we'd like to live.

However, by thinking in these terms, we often forget about the many steps along the way that lead us to our detours, dead ends and destination. This newsletter is an effort to highlight those small steps that will help us along our journey, as well as share success stories of communities of faith across Tennessee who are already focusing on those steps.

Quick Tips for Improving Food in Faith Communities



Host a mindful meal. Consider how the meal is prepared and served. Try using food produced or grown by members in your community. Invite members from all the community to attend.

Schedule a gleaning day. Glean a local farm. Use the produce for your congregation's food pantry or a local food pantry.

Remake your congregation's food pantry with healthier options. Connect with your local agricultural extension agent and/or a local university to help with the makeover.

Start a congregation or community garden. Even a small raised bed to grow herbs is a great start!